

# ON A LARGE VARANUS SPECIES FROM THE ISLAND OF KOMODO.

BY

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Through the kind introduction bij Captain W. L. EINTHOVEN, in December 1910, I entered into correspondence with Mr. J. K. H. VAN STEYN VAN HENSBROEK, 1st Lieutenant of Infantry, who served as Civil Administrater at Reo (Island of Flores).

The latter mentioned, that he had received information from the inhabitants of that island, that in the neighbourhood of Laboean Badjo, and on the island of Komodo occurred a *Varanus* species of an unusual size. They called the animal „Boeaja darat” (land crocodile). His curiosity having been aroused by these reports, he resolved to collect some particulars concerning these animals and to obtain a specimen if possible, as soon as he should be on duty in the island of Komodo.

On his arrival in the island he was provided with the necessary data by Mr. Kock and Mr. ALDEGON a.o., members of the pearling fleet, stationed at Komodo, and both of them keen hunters. They informed Mr. VAN STEYN VAN HENSBROEK, that these animals may even attain a length of 6 to 7 meters. In the beginning of his sojourn in Komodo, Mr. ALDEGON shot a few specimens of that size. Since the island has been more frequented, the animals have withdrawn to the mountains. They live, so he says, exclusively on land, where they make great holes under the stones and rocks, in which they always remain at night. Their feet are fairly long, and in spite of their awkward build, they can move with great rapidity.

In walking, they do not touch the ground, neither with the chest nor with the belly. They walk on the balls of the feet, as may be clearly seen by the callosities on them, as well as by their footprints. The neck is rather long and extraordinarily mobile. The animal can move its head in every direction, and

so it can see everything: this is of great use to the creature, as it seems to be remarkably deaf. Mr. ALDEGON says, that, if only care is taken, that the animal does not see the hunter, the latter may make as much noise as he pleases, without the animal being aware of his presence. Its deafness is confirmed by the circumstance, that it only goes out in the day-time and never at night. They live either singly or in troops. Their food is exclusively of animal nature.

If Mr. ALDEGON shot wild pigs or birds and left them on the ground, they were eaten by the *Boeaja darat*, which sometimes fought desperately for the prey.

The above mentioned notes are according to Mr. VAN STEYN VAN HENSBROEK.

During the time of his stay in Komodo he was fortunate enough to obtain a specimen 2.20 M. long, of which he sent me a photograph <sup>1)</sup> and the skin.

He further informed me, that he would ~~try~~ to catch a living animal of larger size, but that this would not be so easy, as the inhabitants will not run the risk, for the animals not only bite, but keep the natives at a respectful distance by powerful blows with their tails.

As it was now established, that in Komodo exists a species of *Varanus* of exceptional dimensions, a native collector of the Zoological Museum here, was sent to Mr. VAN STEYN VAN HENSBROEK in order to ~~try~~ to obtain further specimens with his assistance. As Mr. VAN STEYN VAN HENSBROEK was soon transferred to Timor, the collector with the Radja Bitjara (native chief) and the necessary natives and dogs started out alone, with the result that he brought home one animal of 2.90 M., <sup>2)</sup> one of 2.35 M. and two very young ones of about 1 M. The two young specimens are still alive.

Finally according to Mr. VAN STEYN VAN HENSBROEK, another specimen of about 4 M. was shot at Komodo by Sergeant BEKER.

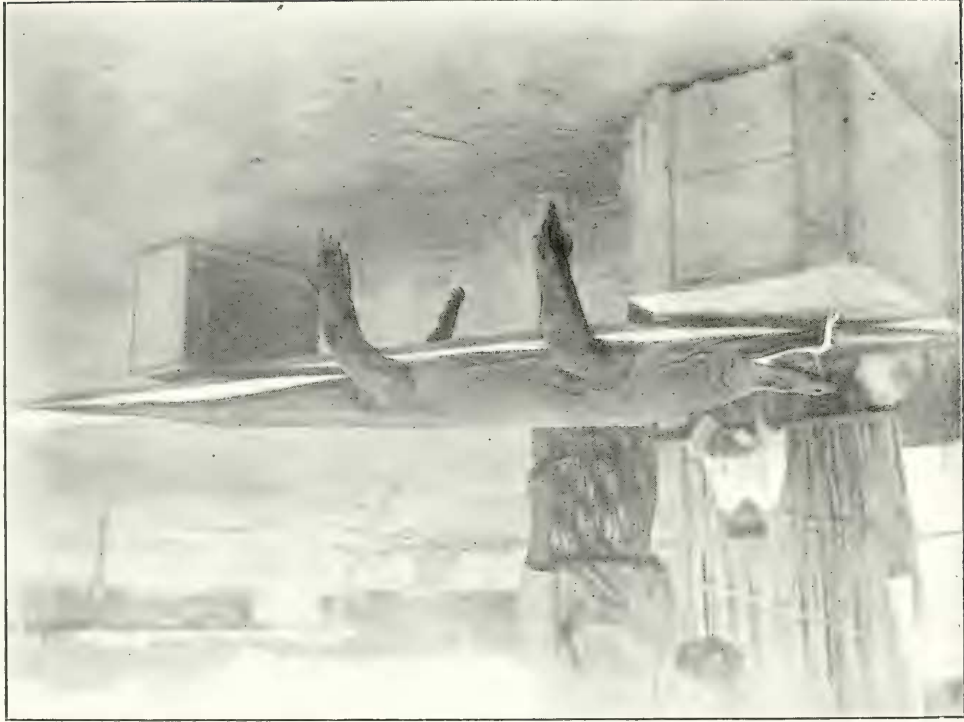
The collector quite confirms the observations of Mr. ALDEGON, regarding deafness and other peculiarities.

Experiments made here with the young animals lead to the same conclusion.

1) Plate I.

2) „ II.

PLATE I.



1:14.



DESCRIPTION.

Teeth acute, compressed. Snout short, depressed at the tip. Nostril oval, three times as far from the orbit as from the tip of the snout. Digits strong. Tail compressed, keeled above. The caudal keel with a low five-sixtoothed crest. Head- and neck-scales large and very strongly keeled <sup>3)</sup>. Abdominal scales keeled, in 97 transverse rows. Caudal scales also keeled and in 218 transverse rows. Scales on upper surface smaller than the neckscales and strongly keeled. Dark brown above. Tongue very long and yellow. Tympanum large.

If the animal is indeed a species not yet described, I propose to call it: *Varanus Komodoensis*.

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<sup>3)</sup> Plate III.



1:2,5

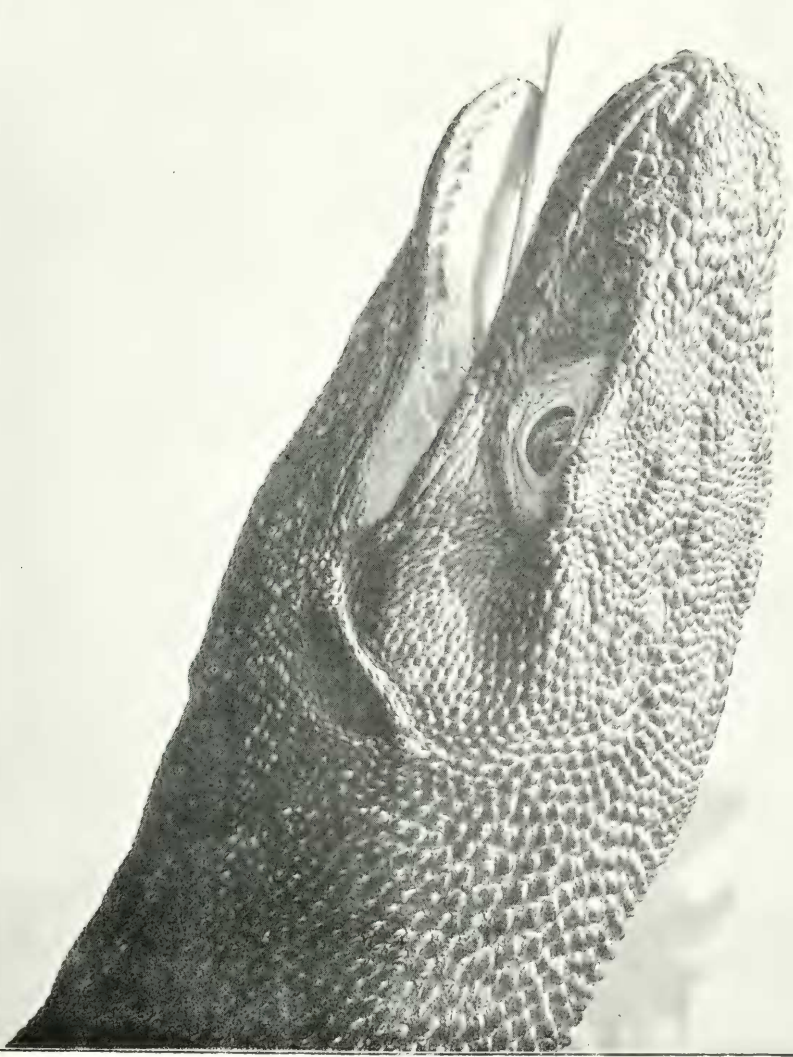


PLATE III.